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英译汉同声传译错误分析  
——基于 2011 年夏季达沃斯论坛同传语料  
库的实证研究

Error Analysis in English-Chinese Simultaneous  
Interpreting: A Corpus-based Study of Simultaneous  
Interpreting at Summer Davos 2011

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## Abstract

Simultaneous interpreting is a challenging task to almost every professional interpreter. Simultaneous interpreters are often shocked to discover numerous errors when comparing their target-language recordings with the original speeches. This dissertation presents a corpus-based study of the English-Chinese simultaneous interpretation of four speeches delivered on the theme “the Great Contraction” at the 2011 Summer Davos. Four panelists present their speeches with various levels of difficulty and different features of utterance, which pose great input and output challenges for the interpreters. In order to further explore the issue, the author firstly draws different theories from home and abroad, demonstrates her own understanding of interpreting quality and sets faithfulness as one of the major benchmarks of measuring errors in the target text.

In the error analysis, the author defines and categorizes errors as omissions, additions and substitutions. Then she takes Daniel Gile’s Effort Model of Simultaneous Interpreting as a basic framework, in order to account for the various types of errors. To be specific, deficiencies in Listening and Analysis, Short-term Memory, Speech Production and Coordination are recognized as prime reasons. To clearly present the process of error analysis, the author tentatively draws a table and further divides errors as mild or gross, in accordance with their severity in undermining the faithfulness to the source gist. After counting and classifying errors, the author summarizes the predominant features of interpreting errors in different speeches, and selects some of the representative sentences.

The implication of this error analysis is to find recurring errors in specific types of speeches and to formulate effective strategies to predict and to overcome them.

**Key words:** error analysis; effort model; source text; target text

## 摘要

对于几乎所有的职业译员来讲,同声传译并非易事,因为译员们常在源语与译语的对比中发现问题。本文的语料库源文取自 2011 年夏季达沃斯论坛“大紧缩”的话题。四位主讲人的发言各具特色,难度各异,对译员的输入输出能力颇具挑战。为了深入研究口译实践中的错误,本文作者在国内外相关文献的基础上,初拟了以源文忠实度为判断译文质量好坏的标准。

作者在错误分析章节为口译错误下定义,并将其归为三类:漏译、增译和替译。本文作者并以 Daniel Gile 的同声传译精力分配模型为基本框架,探索错误产生的原因。导致错误的原因是:听力与分析能力不足,短期记忆不佳,语篇表达不易和协调能力不强。为了更清晰地展现错误分析过程,作者采用图表形式,根据偏离源文主旨的程度,进一步将错误分为主要错误和次要错误。通过错误的计数和分类,作者总结出不同篇章口译错误的不同特征,并选取有代表性的错误句子进行分析。

本文意在研究某类语篇中常犯的口译错误类型,并依此形成有效对策以预测甚至克服这些错误。

**关键词:** 错误分析 精力分配模型 源文 译文

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## **Chapter One Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of Study**

Simultaneous interpreting is recognized by Gile (2009) as an extremely difficult task which may never be perfect. As he further explains, this awareness may arise as the instructors always find errors in the trainees' target speeches and always expect better performance. Corder (1981) says that most people regard learners' errors as an annoying but inevitable byproduct in the learning process of a language. Therefore, a synthetic analysis and evaluation of interpreting errors is indispensable. The author wishes to draw experience and to enhance professionalism through a full analysis of errors in simultaneous interpreting practice, English to Chinese mode, to be specific.

Both the source speeches and the target outputs are derived from the real scenario of the World Economic Forum Summer Davos 2011. Fellow classmates and the author herself led by Professor Xiao made their efforts in the work of transcribing the audio clips and categorizing different types of errors during the interpreting process. In this error analysis, the author tentatively investigates errors across speeches so as to gain the understanding of errors related to different types of speeches. Unlike the previous empirical studies on error analysis which often choose one specific speech or one single interpreter as study objects, this dissertation will draw on various speeches of the Summer Davos 2011 and the performance of two male interpreters.

The purposes of writing this dissertation is to have a better understanding of recurring errors given by different speakers under one subject and to define as well as to categorize errors in a systematic way. As a Chinese old saying goes: "a fall into the pit, a gain in your wit", a person should understand the causes which trigger the error in order to overcome it. By undertaking the error analysis of several simultaneous interpreters, the author can formulate effective strategies beforehand and can minimize occurrence of the same errors in the future.

## 1.2 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation comprises five chapters as presented below:

Chapter One is the introduction, containing the discussion of study background as well as the purpose of error analysis, and the layout of the whole dissertation.

Chapter Two is a literature review, which consists of theoretical evaluation of interpreting quality and a number of related studies in defining faithfulness and categorizing the errors of interpreting practice.

Chapter Three introduces the framework and study method of errors from literature, including Barik's and Altman's classifications of interpreting errors and Gile's well-known model of effort in simultaneous interpreting, which provides four dimensions in accounting for errors. The author will adopt theories from previous literature, and draw a proper framework of her own for analyzing errors in simultaneous interpreting practice.

Chapter Four is an empirical error analysis. In this chapter, the author will firstly explore the function of speeches adopting rhetorical triangle, i.e. the ethos (speaker), pathos (audience) and logos (subject) as well as the information unit structure, and then have an in-depth error analysis of the target text against the original speech. Errors will be numbered and classified into different table cells, and prominent types of errors will be further elaborated using examples excerpted from the source and the target texts. Errors are also marked in the transcript using underlines, boldface and italic forms in accordance with their categorizations.

Chapter Five is the conclusion of the dissertation which looks back and restates the main points, arguments and findings briefly. More importantly, the author will do a self-assessment which claims strengths and admits weaknesses (limitations and omissions) and provide suggestions for follow-up research.

## Chapter Two Literature Review

Researchers have done a great deal of studies in defining and categorizing errors in interpreting process. However, before errors are to be defined and classified in this dissertation, the author will draw different theories and make a brief account of interpreting quality. In *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1967), quality is defined as the degree of conformance to a standard. By establishing a set of rigid standards, the author can judge whether the target interpretations analyzed in this dissertation are good or bad. If they fail to meet those criteria, some errors that hamper interpreters' performance can be recognized. Therefore, a brief discussion of interpreting quality is indispensable to a meaningful understanding of errors.

### 2.1 Interpreting Quality

#### 2.1.1 Studies in China

Since the implementation of reform and opening up policy, cross-cultural and people-to-people exchange has grown rapidly, imposing greater challenges on interpreting performance. However, the evaluation of interpreting quality is far from satisfactory, as most of the relevant research are based on the reflection upon interpreter's personal practice and experience. In the following paragraph, the author will firstly have a glimpse and make a brief account of the previous literature in China.

The translation theory of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” proposed by Yan Fu is regarded as the universal standard of interpreting quality. Moreover, due to the time limit of interpreting activities, some scholars adopt “accuracy, fluency and quickness” as their benchmark. These opinions, however, are too general and hard to grasp despite their strength in reflecting the unique features of interpreting process.

In order to probe into the feasibility of interpreting quality evaluation, Hu Gengshen (1990) proposes his “CREDIT” mode, including credibility, representability,

elegance, diversity, immediateness and technicality. He tries to utilize formula to quantify parameters by means of defining the factors that impede interpreting quality and setting scores in accordance with their importance. Qian Wei claims in his book *Flexibility of Interpreting* (1996) that the original intention, communicative context and interactive response are key components in considering the mental activities of an interpreter. Bao Gang (2011) emphasizes that “completeness” is the foremost benchmark, which refers to the all-inclusiveness of the gist of the original discourse, and the completeness of source image as well as the connotative meaning.

Yang Chengshu (2000) from Fu Jen Catholic University further differentiates the notions of “quantify” and “qualify” in interpreting tests. She notes that the former should be evaluated while the latter described. In this way, these two criteria can complement each other in terms of their reliability and effectiveness. Chen Jing (2002) from Xiamen University suggests the theory of communicative language testing of Lyle Bachman be adopted in evaluating interpreting performance in her 《从 Bachman 交际法语言测试理论看口译测试中的重要因素》。

Most of the above-mentioned literature are purely theoretical, and not until 1990s did the empirical research in this field begin to flourish. Overall, both the quantity and the quality of these studies lag behind those from abroad. The major contribution to this field are:

He Huiling (2004), from October 1997 to June 1998, conducted questionnaire survey in nine of the international academic conferences with the assistance of the National Science Council, aiming at gathering experience from the speakers, sponsors, interpreters and audience. Interpreters, for instances, covers both professionals, amateurs and student interpreters. The first finding is surprising, as comments on professionals and student interpreters are merely the same. The second is that requirements and expectations from sponsors, speakers as well as audience are quite close, and testifies the outcome of some western studies. This survey demonstrates that correctness of the original content and terminologies are greatly valued under the circumstance of academic conference.

Ru Mingli (2004), whose main subjects are professional interpreters and the audience, distributes her questionnaires in five international forums, which are later classified into three categories: business, engineering and religion. She finds out that, first of all, both the audience and interpreters pay special attention to the content rather than the form, however, the listeners' demands on interpreting performance differs greatly when they attend different types of forums. For instance, the audience in business forum have higher expectation for the correctness of terminologies than in other forum. What's more, Ms Ru claims that professional interpreters and the audience hold different views in terms of the role of an interpreter. Professional interpreters believe that flexibility should be indispensable when an interpreter is trying to mimic the speaker and keeps loyal to the original discourse, whereas the audience expects to hear the target outputs as faithful to the original as possible. Thirdly, she notes that the listeners' view upon the rules of an interpreter varies in different scenarios. To make it clear, the audience in business forum hold higher demands on the faithfulness to the source text, and hope not to see the interpreter altering, adding or even omitting some information from the speaker. However, listeners from the religion forum give more freedom to the interpreter. Audience's expectation in the engineering forum is in the middle.

In general, Chinese scholars have gained much knowledge in theoretical studies of interpreting, started their empirical research into the quality of interpreting, and set various standards of evaluation. However, we should admit that the outcome of research is far from satisfactory. Foreign researchers held systematic and extensive exploration into this field with relatively comprehensive theories.

### **2.1.2 Studies abroad**

When evaluating the quality of interpreting, there are a great deal of criteria which come into play and conference simultaneous interpreting scholars have yet reached any agreement in this area. Interpreting quality has always been "a basic concern underlying the process of professionalization" (Pöchhacker, 2004) and "its definition has become increasingly complicated" as the research in this field has expanded towards a broader

view rather than purely “linguistic” and “technical” (Garzone, 2002) Kopczynski (1994) further elaborates on this point by saying that at least two aspects should be considered when examining the quality of a target discourse: pragmatics and linguistics.

On the one hand, interpreting quality can be assessed in a pragmatic sense. Kopczynski (1994) notes that “pragmatics deals with situated speech, and is akin to the concept of communication in general.” According to Gile (2009), the relation between “satisfactory quality” and “the level of fidelity, linguistic acceptability, clarity, or terminological accuracy” of the target speech can be weak. To be specific, situated factors such as the relationship between participants or the setting of a conference complicate the criteria of interpretation quality as merely transferring Language A into Language B from the linguistic aspect is not enough. The interpreter should also take into account the situated variables while producing the target output.

From the linguistic point of view, on the other hand, the quality of interpreting should be judged either from the speaker-oriented perspective or by the target-text comprehensibility, and thus the key standard of interpreting quality focuses on the “faithful reproduction” or the “faithful image” (Gile, 2009) of the original discourse. Kopczynski (1994) views the quality of interpreting as “a set of rigid standards of equivalence in content and form”. Moser-Mercer (1996) notes that faithfulness to the source text is primary expectation from the listeners, followed by content, synchronicity, rhetorical skills and voice quality. In this sense, the faithfulness to the original text is measured in terms of the quality of interpretation.

Guided by the previous literature and taken into account the difficulties in probing into the pragmatic factors of interpreters, the author chooses to evaluate the quality of the following interpretations purely from a linguistic perspective and set “faithfulness” as the prior criterion.

As different language has different grammatical and syntactical structure, word-for-word interpretation is impossible and impractical. In the following section, the author will probe into various definitions of errors and further elaborate on study of faithfulness from home and abroad.

## 2.2 Errors

As the author have mentioned in the previous section, faithfulness is set as the benchmark of interpreting quality. As Barik (1994) puts it, the error of translation can be defined as the substitution “at considerable variance with the original version.” He then conducted an empirical study of six English-French interpreters of varying proficient levels (including two professionals, two student interpreters and two amateurs) to illustrate three general departures from the source text: the interpreter may omit, add or substitute some material from the original version (Barik, 1994). Firstly, omissions refer to “items present in the original version, which are left out of the translation” by interpreters (Barik, 1994), which include the omission of a single lexical item, the omission of a large unit of text due to inability to catch the meaning of the source text or due to the lagging of the target text, and the omission of compounding several elements. Additions, on the contrary, refer to the “items not to be found in the original, which are added to the text” by the interpreter (Barik, 1994). Similarly, four types of additions are identified as undermining the faithfulness of the source speech: qualifier addition, elaboration addition, relationship addition and closure addition. Lastly, substitutions, or what he calls “errors of translation”, refer to “material substituted by the T for something said by the S and involving a speech segment ranging from a single lexical item to a complete sentence unit” (Barik, 1994). He further explains five categories of substitutions (errors): mild semantic error, gross semantic error, mild phrasing change, substantial phrasing change and gross phrasing change.

Even though Barik’s study has its value for future research in error analysis, his categorization of errors according to their seriousness is somewhat subjective. A conference interpreter Eliane Bros-Brann (Pöchhacker, 2004) rejected Barik’s research scheme as “pure unadulterated jabberwocky.” His criticism focused on Barik’s experimental design of “four different input conditions and a very heterogeneous group of only six subjects”. Among whom, two had neither been trained nor experienced simultaneous interpreting process, and another two were merely trained but not professional. He further added, Barik’s classification of errors relied only on his own



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